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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a case study that identified the new forms of accountability and control being constructed locally in the education service of England and Wales since the major legislative changes made in 1988. The changes include local school management, grant-maintained schooling, and competitive contract tendering. The 1988, 1992, and 1993 Education Acts constitute an institutional and political threat to the local education agencies (LEAs). A shift in the locus of power--a combination of devolution and centralization--reduces LEA power and budgetary freedom and endangers local democratic control over education. The paper presents findings of case studies of two LEAs, illustrating the extent to which LEA systems and processes have been variously reconstructed since 1988 to create new and distinctive cultures and to produce new forms of control and accountability. A conclusion is that the argument to remove education from the political arena (Chubb 1990) is being fulfilled in the United Kingdom. The new "invisible" politics of education allow certain interests to maximize their advantages through domination of local magistocracies and their abilities to "work" deregulated market systems. (LMI)

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Claiming the educational agenda: Local Government and Educational Politics in the UK

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This paper draws on case-study data from a Joseph Rowntree Foundation funded research project entitled LEAs: Accountability and Control. The research seeks to identify what new forms of accountability and control are being constructed locally in the education service of England and Wales in the wake of major legislative changes since1988.

These far reaching legislative changes combining pressures of the Local Management of Schools (that is budgetary devolution), Grant Maintained Schooling (the possibility that schools 'opt out' of Local Authority control) and Competitive Contract Tendering (the possibility that schools can make financial arrangements with private providers for services ranging from maintenance to legal services) present a basic challenge to the roles and purposes (and in the long term the existence) of LEAs. They must not only find ways of coping with the pace and scope of change but find ways of managing change effectively that will ensure their own survival. The 1988, 1992 and 1993 Education Acts (which extend and develop earlier legislation) together constitute a dual threat to the continued existence of LEAs. One aspect of this threat is institutional. A shift in the locus of power - a combination of devolution, to schools, and centralisation, to the state - which leaves the LEA with a much reduced set of responsibilities, few powers and little budgetary freedom. The other aspect is political. The evacuation of responsibility, power and budgetary freedom threatens to render local democratic control over education obsolete/ defunct.

Typically education policy analysts have adopted the line that the National Curriculum and LMS represent two very different, and perhaps contradictory, aspects of education reform. The first as a form of centralisation and the latter as decentralisation. But that position ignores the extent to which LMS involves an assertion of central state control over the size, distribution, purposes and methods of local educational funding. The possibilities of local responsiveness to educational need and the setting of local priorities are severely constrained. Both the National Curriculum and LMS operate by excluding professional judgements from educational planning.

The relationship between central and local government in England and Wales has been a perennially fraught one. Since the beginnings of local electoral representation in the 1830s Conservative Governments in particular have found themselves in regular conflict with Local Authorities. As (Duncan 1988) note the tensions between the central and local state which have been evident since 1979 "should be seen as only the latest stage in a long history of central government restructuring in local-central relations, although of course it constitutes a significant step in the process" (p.3). And it is not difficult to demonstrate the place that the recent shifts in control of education hold in this long history. Nigel Lawson, Margaret Thatcher's last Chancellor, wrote in his recent autobiography that his support for the 1987 Education Reform Bill was based on the fact that it would "kill two birds with one stone... Not only could we make possible the improvement in standards of education the country so badly needed, but we could also solve the linked problem... of the relationship between central and local government, and the lack of local government accountability" (Lawson 1992 p.607).

For the purposes of this paper two LEAs (from the 4 case studies currently underway) will be counter posed. While both are urban/metropolitan Authorities they represent a polarisation of circumstances with regard to their geographical location, school numbers, political composition/constitution, GM school proportion (and corresponding involvement with the Funding Agency for Schools (FAS) see below). They have been selected to illustrate the extent to which LEA systems, practices, processes and relations have been variously re-constructed since 1988 to

create new and distinctive cultures and produce new forms of control and accountability.

Table 1. Summary of main characteristics of 4 LEAS

	Metroland	Northerton	Cwmshire	Westmoor
Council politics	Conservative	Labour	Labour	Lib-Dem Hung
Location	South/Urban	North/ Met	Wales/ Shire	South-West/Shire
Schools Sec - Prim	14 64	29 140	28 243	52 292
GM Schools Sec - Prim	12 2	2 9	4 2	6 1
FAS	yes	No	No	No
PSB - del 1994/95	89.8%	85.03%	85%	87.5%

Metroland has developed a culture and set of working methods which is business oriented and 'minimalist' and founded on the ideology and practices of modern industrial management. Northerton, by contrast, does not recognise or associate itself explicitly with any business/market orientation, but rather it retains a strong corporate sense of identity, preferring a 'user - friendly' framework to cater for its tasks. In this culture all education services are autonomous yet bound together within a framework of shared values articulated in a language of 'partnership'. It may come as no surprise when we report that Metroland has been Conservative controlled since 1990 and that Northerton has a long history of Labour Party control. Both Authorities have changed markedly since 1988, in size, shape, purpose and in their relationships with schools. These changes are similar in many ways, legislative requirements are inescapable. However, here we want to concentrate upon the differences and to consider their significance. In doing so we will explore two key propositions identified by Duncan and Goodwin (1988) in their analysis of local-central state relations. That the local state exists in a contradictory relationship "as agent and obstacle to the centre" (p. 277); and that underpinning this, the local state "performs both an interpretive and a representational role" (p.274).

Background /Policy Framework.

Fifteen years of Conservative government in the UK has seen a growing centralisation of education power in Whitehall and the burgeoning of government appointed Quangos (quasi-autonomous national government organisations). The spending freedom of local authorities has been curbed, budgets have been delegated to individual schools, and schools allowed/encouraged to opt out of local authority control. Through the 1988 Education Reform Act the Government has secured maximum delegation of financial and managerial responsibilities to schools, and has required the allocation of resources on the basis of a public formula rather than by local political or professional judgement. Through the LMS scheme and on the basis of formula funding each LEA must now devolve a minimum of 85% of its total budget for schools (the PSB) directly to the schools for them to manage, to a great extent, as they see fit. Furthermore, formula funding requires that 90% of the devolved funds be allocated in relation to pupil numbers weighted by age. This latter, in many settings, creates the basis for a competitive market in education in that school income is related directly to their recruitment. These statutory requirements have been in force since April 1990. For LEAs one immediate consequence of this is that the proportion of monies available for central administration and central services has declined considerably and is declining further as each local government spending round takes effect. As a consequence many of the roles and functions formerly carried out by LEAs are either carried out by individual schools or have been discarded. In a variety of ways these new funding arrangements are the fundamental mechanism of national control over the provision of local educational services.

Recent legislation effects LEA finances and roles in another way. In a process initiated by Governors and culminating in a vote of parents, it is now possible for individual schools, to 'opt out' of LEA control (for GM status) and be funded directly by central government. Schools which take this route not only escape from most aspects of LEA supervision/surveillance (such as they now are) but also receive directly in their annual budget allocation that proportion of the budget which would have previously been retained by the LEA for central services, plus certain

transitional grants. The LEA funds are reduced accordingly. At present the budgets of GM schools remain tied to the level of funding set by their former LEA[1] .

Finally the Government's control of overall Local Authority spending needs to be mentioned. Central government provides 80% of local government spending (through the Revenue Support Grant Settlement). These monies are allocated on the basis of estimates of local 'need' calculated centrally (SSAs) and any local overspending is punished by 'rate-capping', that is a reduction in future allocations. The SSAs are consistently criticised by Local Authorities on the grounds that they do not provide any satisfactory means of accountability.

> 'I don't know how many understand the SSA figures. All I know is that the Government assessment of what are the needs in this authority compared to other comparable authorities has meant that schools get less here. Further, the Government publish a set of rules about this but what they don't publish is how these rules are interpreted - so there's a lack of accountability there' . **(Director of Education; Northerton)**

Local Authorities retain decision-making power over the distribution of allocations between budget headings and Education is the single largest such budget heading in most cases.

In the recently announced RSGS for 1995-96 not only is there no growth in allocations from the previous year but no allowance has been made for the funding of the school teachers' pay award. The Government expects the award to be funded by 'efficiency savings' and cuts.

The Government then not only has national control over local authority spending, but it is a regulating force in relation to a full range of other legislative demands which are levelled at LEAs and schools. Financial accountability and responsibility is spread now somewhat unclearly between Whitehall, Government quangos, local authorities and individual schools. In effect LEAs have little local discretion in relating budgets to need.

Aside from financial forces and constraints which impinge upon LEAs, other aspects of educational reform now limit their powers and responsibilities. The power relations between central and local government consolidated in the 1988 and the 1993 Education Acts have been described as precipitating a "confused co-existence between national and local government" **(Local Councillor in Northerton)** giving Whitehall a licence to procrastinate and confuse the public as to where responsibility for educational policy making lies.

The legislative framework and the educational relations between central and local government have radically changed over the 1985 - 1995 period. In brief.
The 1986 Act established a new statutory framework for school governors defining the respective roles of governors, headteachers and the LEA.
The 1988 Education Reform Act altered the basis of the relationship between the then DES and LEAs and LEAs and educational institutions.
The 1992 Schools Act privatised school inspections

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[1]By January 1994 812 schools had achieved GM status in England. (cmnd 2510, para 37) . By April 1994 pupil numbers in the GM sector were some 40 per cent below the level previously planned by the Government. (Figures for Wales are unknown)

The 1993 Act established the FAS to administer money to GM schools, it encourages and makes easier selection and specialisation by schools, and extends 'opting out' to include special schools.

In particular the 1988 ERA brought about fundamental changes to the balance of power between central government, local government and education institutions. Central government assumed increased powers for the curriculum - largely at the expense of the local authorities, marginalising LEA- school-based curriculum development activities. In sharp contrast by decentralising control over human and physical resources to the governing bodies of schools, the reforms not only reduce the power of educational administrators and politicians in local government, but also they require headteachers to reconstruct their working relationship with governing bodies. A whole range of powers and responsibilities have been deluged upon Governors and headteachers since 1988.

The privatisation of school inspections in the 1992 Schools Act is significant in two respects. First, it reduces further the direct responsibility of LEAs for monitoring of their local schools. Second, it gives further expression to the Government preference for an education service governed by the principles of accelerating national regulation and market forces. Under the 1992 Act inspection funds were withdrawn from public expenditure allocations. Resources available to LEAs were thus further reduced, causing many LEAs to revise again their conception of their role and function. As a result advisory work has more often than not been superseded by work with a more inspectorial- consultancy edge.

The 1993 Act brings together major elements of the Government's key reforms within a single piece of legislation. It substantially re-writes part of the Education Act 1981 concerning children with special educational needs, it builds on sections of the National Curriculum and on GM schools, and, it extends the provision of the Education(Schools) Act 1992 on inspection. The 1993 Act has its origins in the White paper Choice and Diversity: A New Framework for Schools (cmnd 2021) published in 1992. It sought to develop further what, the then Secretary of State, John Patten, called 'the 5 themes' : - quality, diversity, increasing parental choice, greater autonomy for schools and, greater accountability. - these have run through educational change since 1979. At its heart is the Government's push to increase the size of the GM school sector and further develop its managerial and financial structure. It also revises the duties of the Secretary of State, LEAs and schools and creates a new funding authority, the FAS, with financial and administrative powers in LEAs where there are significant numbers of students in GM schools. In the few cases of authorities like Metroland, where 12 of the 14 secondary schools are 'opted out', the FAS takes over full responsibility for the management of places, for that age sector. The Act also amends the law in relation to providing school places, school admissions, religious education and introduces new regulations in relation to special educational needs provision.

In short the 1993 Act attaches some new responsibilities to LEAs but there are no new accompanying powers. Indeed as in 1988 powers (and responsibilities) are shifted away from the LEAs to the Secretary of State, the DfE, to school governors and the FAS. While some of these changes are clear cut, other portend further uncertainties. This is apparent for example when schools and education departments are in conflict over finding school places for excluded pupils. In these cases the LEA has a statutory obligation to champion the rights of the individual regardless of school wishes i.e.. the school-governor policy.

> "Its the rights of the individuals that come first. My relationship with schools is quite different now because I act as an advocate, a voice, an enabler, for people and where that means I am in conflict

with schools then I'm in conflict with schools!" (Assistant Director, Northerton)

Such hiatuses do little to ensure good LEA/school relations.

Whilst the Government largely through the Treasury, the DfE and SCAA (Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority), is the main determiner of resource allocation and school priorities,. LEAs have specific legal responsibilities for the planning and the development of schools. Further LEAs must support schools and governors in carrying out their responsibilities and ensure that monitoring systems are adequate to identify and enable them to take action where delegated powers are being used inappropriately. In this way LEAs continue to have some scope for establishing priorities and shaping local education provision through their policy framework: see (Ball 1994).

Central educational policies - local interpretations

The policy agenda of the Government over the 1985 - 1995 period has been to reform the local governance of education by changing the relations of power, the values and form of organisation of schools in the pursuit of a new social and political order. In this restructuring lay school Governors (made up of 'elected' parental representative and appointees)[2] have emerged with considerably increased powers and responsibilities although in practice many remain heavily dependent upon the professional leadership and decision-making of headteachers.

> "Once or twice I've informed Governors about things that are happening and they've almost brushed it off saying it has nothing to do with them. They rely on me" (Headteacher; Northerton)

Generally, governors knowledge about *educational* institutions and processes sometimes appears 'incomplete, fragmented and on, occasions inaccurate' (Brehony 1995 p.94). Contradictions of this kind are central when considering issues of governance, many lines of responsibility and accountability are ambiguous and particularly difficult to unravel.

But by reducing significantly the local administrative and controls that LEA officers and local politicians can assert over schools the education reform legislation is changing the locus and nature of democratic control.

> "Governors ring up and say they don't like what's happening in their school ..and I say But you are the governor, yes ,they say but cant you tell them that they cant do this... and I repeat but you are the governor... yes, they say but I cant get the others to agree. And I say well, sorry, but that's what democracy means, that's what local management means.."

(Councillor; Northerton)

At the heart of these challenges to the existing model of local educational provision is the Conservative Government's belief that responsibility for the failures and defects supposedly apparent within the education system lay with professionals and local politicians and that a new education system founded on principles of consumer choice and accountability would better serve parental needs and the national interest.

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[2] Schools governors are in effect a small scale version of the so called 'new magistocracy', un-elected, un(clearly)accountable place persons and political appointees.

All LEAs are having to come to grips with these new and 'externally' generated -financial, policy and legislative- forces. These provide the means by which the state regulates the 'contextual' conditions for local market operation. These external forces have taken effect to the extent that LEAs, more particularly, the executive arm of the education authority, are losing their 'contested' claim on local education. New patterns of educational governance are developing. Financial contraction alone has placed LEAs under severe pressure: internal organisational cuts, and/ or the contracting out services, and / or commercialising transactions through legally binding contractual arrangements are commonplace. Whilst all LEAs are dealing with these 'externally' generated forces in the analysis of change these have to be set against 'internally' generated forces which arise out of circumstantial, 'localised' and historical human and resource needs, as well as local political history and local demographic and financial conditions. These 'internally' generated forces are bound up with internal developmental needs and aspirations - the overall vision of the LEA itself.

Local enactment of legislation,
or Local Policies.

The contraction of resources both locally, through GMS, and nationally, through general expenditure cuts, together with the deregulation of resources and services generates pressure upon the LEA to externalise or privatise services. Whilst some view this as the natural way to move forward in line with government ideology, others are proactively seeking to re-claim the educational agenda for themselves in seeking alternative ways in which to develop and deal with tasks. Our case study authorities exemplify these two different approaches to managing the changes.

Whilst the constraints and requirements of legislation are formidable, where the underlying ideology is not shared at local level, we can begin to see the peculiarities of policy interpretation coming into play. But differences in response to and interpretation of government policy are contingent not only upon the philosophies, beliefs and values which underlie the process, practice and procedures at local level, but they are also linked to the ways in which the Local Authority interpret local needs. These needs have shaped the organisation, the structure, framework and political cultures of the areas under study over time.

For Northerton LEA the management of a newly structured, so called, 'user friendly' service has been the main aim since 1988. Acting in harmony the LEA and (its) schools have set out to resist the hard business culture underpinning the educational reforms. They are opposed to and have resisted the use of the terminology of competition and business practices. The local headteachers confront and resist the issue of competition on a regular basis.

> 'We wouldn't want competition to enter our system. The issue of schools competing for pupils is constantly on the agenda for our Heads. They are conscious that it must not be allowed to happen.' **(Director of Education; Northerton)**

> "heads are uncompetitive they want an LEA, a strategy. At the last Heads Conference they chose a theme of school improvement, developing a steering group for this purpose and have gone to the Director saying they want it spearheaded by the LEA. Its come from them, its going to be formalised and taken forward... It's an illustration of partnership, of working together. On the steering group we are all equal players its not a Heads initiative, its not an LEA initiative but its one we have taken together." **(Assistant Director; Northerton)**

And, regardless of their reluctance to either amalgamate or close, few Northerton schools cited in the LEA rationalisation programme have selected to opt out of the maintained system.

The lack of 'opting out' may well be attributed to the ideological basis of the relationships between the authority and the schools which is manifest in the interdependent- partnership relations between all key parties in the process of education at local level. In their mutual resistance against this government initiative/ policy the LEA is reconstructing, if not strengthening, the cohesive relationship between the authority and school against the pressures from these forces. In Northerton each school belongs to a 'cluster'. Cluster meetings are held regularly with officers and members in attendance. In addition Headteacher conferences take place on a regular basis. These were initiated by the LEA Directorate but are now 'owned' by the Headteachers themselves and are a common feature reflecting a collaborative/partnership style of operation.

> One important thing about our culture is the way in which we fulfil the expectations of our Heads. They are consulted on absolutely everything - that is the culture. **(Deputy Director)**

In contrast, while competition between schools is fairly muted and low key the relationship between Metroland LEA and its schools is generally very different. The LEA has moved away decisively from the concept of corporate public sector provision to what the Director describes (below) as a 'local education service'. And indeed the Conservative controlled Council and senior officers have actively encouraged secondary schools to opt out of direct local authority control.

> "Councillor Blunstone who is the leader of the council is governor of several schools and has campaigned for GM schools. Preistley Grange for instance has had 3 ballots for GM. In the first two the NUT at the school activity campaigned against it and that was the only school where there was a campaign and the parents voted to stay with the LEA. So on the subject of budget making Preistly school had £290.000 cut off its budget which made the NUT give up so on the third ballot the parents voted to opt out". **(Deputy Education Director;Metroland)**

One respondent in Metroland offered the view that:

> ...the Director of Education would very much like to be the first Director of Education with no LEA schools, he'd like that notoriety"... The Director is a member of the governing body of two GM schools and he had encouraged them to opt out, he advised the two head teachers to put in their applications for GM, the flavour there is Technology College status, he wanted a CTC but that policy sort of collapsed... we're now left with a sort of remnant policy..."
>
> In essence I think what I've tried to do and really taken 6 years and it was like what I said to the members I would try and do .. has been the bringing in LMS. I said at the time I thought we might become the first local authority that had no secondary schools and I was spot that ... we didn't quite manage it but we got perilously close to it ... We're an authority that has an immediate link with the FAS for example now. I said we would move to at situation where the localised decision taking would get bigger and bigger and bigger and we would not be uncomfortable with that. I came at that from the perspective of having managed a school, and I actually didn't have a very high opinion of the centres of the 4 local authorities I have worked for. I didn't have a very high opinion of the centre here to be frank, when I worked here. It was bureaucratic, it was clumsy, it made decisions very slowly, it was unclear within itself

where the power to make given decisions resided... **(Director of Education; Northerton)**

Nonetheless, in Metroland there are still informal but significant contacts between the LEA and the local secondary schools. "The Director and I meet with the heads monthly as always" **(Deputy Education Director)**. GM schools remain tied to the LEA budget setting and therefore still have a continuing interest in maintaining relationships. But these relations could be regarded as fragile. As in Northerton, despite the difference in political and ideological context, the Director of Education employs a language of 'partnership'. The nuances of language are important in trying to capture the significance of differences between LEAs.

> ...in January and February of this year through a series of conferences that I chaired with my head teachers which I presented a concept which was less far away from where we've been than I think some of them realise but which brought us to the point where we were talking about LES, the local education service, which is essentially built on a series of as far as possible co-operative partnerships, not all partnerships are co-operative, betwixt the centre, the primaries, the secondaries, the adult education service, the libraries and arts service and our now big global autonomous college which I still have quite close links...

The contrasting ideologies between the two case study LEAs are fairly clearly illustrated by the pace and the way in which each responded to LMS and the delegation of funding to schools. Cultural shifts in Northerton have been gradual, politicians in particular, were reluctant to relinquish their power by giving schools financial / administrative responsibility.

> 'This Council were dragged 'kicking and screaming' into funding delegation - into LMS' **(Headteacher; Northerton)**

Metroland on the other hand has shown a great enthusiasm for Government initiative accelerating its commitment to LMS, initiating delegation a year earlier than they were formally required to do so. Furthermore, the formal relationships between LEA and schools in Metroland is now based upon a client-contractor culture. This culture is realised through a set of complex relationships. In some circumstances the school is client, in others the Council itself is client. The residual functions of the LEA are conceived and organised within this framework.

> we devolved all the INSET monies to schools, they were given a cheque book and a cheque book account so its not a notional devolvement and with that money the invitation is to buy inspectors time and servicing and largely it is bought back but that doesn't generate a lot of their income... INSET and advice is paid for past a certain level, in other words our view is that if a headteacher rings up and asks for guidance from a specialist inspector on reorganising the maths curriculum the client for that is the council, the council has the responsibility to maintain quality schools so the initial consultancy is that. But if the headteacher, having received advice. says right I want a whole series of workshops for my year 6 teachers on the teaching of number the client for that is the school. So it's this concept of having different clients. **(Deputy Education Director;Metroland)**

The LEA have continued to initiate and implement devolution ahead of Government requirements and timetables. The delegation of LMS budgets to Special Schools and specialist units to 'opted out' schools are examples.

> What we intend to do is to keep the Ed Psych and EWS and everything else goes [apart from hospital tuition and the PRU as it turns out]. The rest of the budget about £160,000 will be devolved to schools, trying to get them to buy back the teachers who are working in that unit. We think that will probably

happen because mostly it's work with excluded kids, and if the schools don't want the kids they'll buy back. We've got them over a barrel on that. [As he went on to say] my understanding is that we have a statutory responsibility but we don't have a statutory requirement to provide. Thus other SEN services [4 special units] will be devolved to the GM schools and special schools [there are 5]; we gave the partial hearing and partial sight unit to Leesworth and that's worked very well, they operate it on behalf of the council. **(Deputy Education Director; Metroland)**

The effect of all this is that the LEA is virtually engaged in a process of dis-establishing itself. As more services and funding is devolved to schools, or contracted out to commercial providers, combined with local and central government cuts in overall levels of funding, the LEA workforce diminishes and with it the ability of the LEA to deal with even its remaining responsibilities and the needs for support of local schools.

so there's stresses with the governing body. I mean they aren't here .. but I know it can change ... my stress is what if somebody comes like I hear from other people ... a person and views it .. and that's quite frightening because as you say there is a vulnerability, there is no LEA for me to run to .. and the LEA is .. before could remove governors from governing bodies so I think we miss that ...
The only reason I mean if you think about it, the only reason perhaps I would think about being GM is my .. anger ... my anger would be ... it would perhaps tie in with your question because there is a local education authority to some extent, there is some left ... is it the local education authority left the one I wanted, take for example now I'm supposed to re-do teachers contracts .. I resent that .. I mean this is yet another piece of ...worry because I don't know about contracts,
(Headteacher, LEA Primary School;Metroland)

In Metroland the LEA is seen in minimalist terms elected representatives have an increasing marginal role and impact in the local system. Local democracy is expressed through the choices of individual clients and the responses of individual schools. The authority is a mediator between clients and service providers. In this way it is accountable through the information it offers its clients and service providers. It operates not so much a market system as a management/business system.

The current structure, culture and practice in Metroland is wholly derived from Conservative policies for local government. Indeed the Leader, the Chief Executive and the Director of Central Services are policy enthusiasts. The term ' Quality Council' is the key term used to represent the authority's philosophy and goals this gives rise to a 'total quality management' style of operation based upon 'customer needs', 'the liberation, freedom and empowerment of staff', 'review and improvement' and so on. Performance management techniques have been introduced with the help of an outside agency. Business units within each department have been created and tasks are divided into the **contracting, commissioning and core** categories. Contracting refers to those authority activities which are 'externalised', that is they are 'bought' from outside companies, e.g. legal services and the payroll. Commissioning involves the provision of services by Council business units at cost, in education this includes the service work of the Inspection unit which is bought by both LEA and GM schools. Core activities are those defined as primary Council functions and are paid by central funds. The Inspection Unit carries out 'Director's inspections' where the Council is the client and these are paid for from Education Department funds. In fact the Inspection Unit generates its income from three main sources: from advice and support to schools - in-service etc. (10%) ; from inspection work carried out for the Council - (85%); and from Ofsted inspections (5%). However, the split between these categories is sometimes blurred.

> As a consequence of the implementation of these methods we've gone down from 10 departments to 5 and have gone down from about 10,000 staff to 4,000 staff. not counting teachers... One of the councillors has actually said in the chamber that he would like the Council to employ 180 people in the model of the American system where Council sits once a year to issue contracts and the whole Council's role is focused around that. **(Deputy Director of Education; Metroland)**

Here public management mirrors the systems and mechanisms of the private sector and regulation by contract. Jobs and tasks are directly related to and evaluated in terms of costs and income. As noted already one result of this streamlined business approach (together with devolution and reductions in central government grants) is a continuing reduction in the services the LEA is willing or capable of providing. In this respect the LEA has been described 'as a provider of the last resort' (Ranson: The New System of Governance for Education R000 231879). As the system matures 'externally' generated forces become 'internalised' giving rise to self containment and self regulation.

In contrast in Northerton the structure, culture and practices are, in part at least, based on shared values. These are drawn from the socialist traditions of its authority. The belief is that education is a dynamic process that can contribute towards the transformation of society. Such a vision gives emphasis to the importance of the local authority, as opposed to central government, as the vehicle through which locally responsive education is provided. However, in Northerton, as elsewhere, structural, organisation and policy changes have been, in large part, driven by legislative changes since 1988. A change in Director, a revamp in the composition of LEA personnel together with a migration of officers from other LEA cultural backgrounds has reinforced changes in attitude. Emphasis has shifted away from what was perceived as the traditional 'cosy- friendly' protective relations with schools, a major feature prior to 1988, towards relations based on **partnership and consultation**. This change coincided with the authority's difficult financial circumstances, budgetary cuts and the need for the authority in its entirety, including the education department, to 'grasp the nettle'**(Assistant Director)** in terms of providing a more efficient - effective education service.

> The Development Plan with values set out emerged because the legislation made us wonder why we wanted to do certain things, and in a sense we traced those back to how we wanted to do things because there are things we believe in. The customer/ client focus is highlighted in the plan. **(Director of Education; Northerton)**

Such changes illustrate, if not characterise, its new culture : a corporate interdependent culture retaining some collectivist principles within the management language of customer/client. One consistent underlying feature of the LEA culture is the principle borne out of ideology shared by headteachers, councillors and officers that 'the LEA would survive regardless of central political control'. Survival within the new legislative framework has meant compromise and the 'satisficing change'.

The new language adopted by the LEA itself transmits a powerful cultural message, which in spite of the resistance towards business/ market relations and associated practices resonates within a client/customer framework. Clearly the principle lessons of contemporary management theory are evident but relations based on partnership and consultation bring particular nuances to **'getting close to the customer'**. Theory and rhetoric have been 'tweaked' to embrace the attitudes, beliefs and values which are an inherent legacy of a traditionally political democratically accountable authority. Change is circumscribed by a reluctance to

embrace the terminology associated with business practice, hence the resort to a softer "user-friendly" approach

The Development Plan of the Education Committee for 1993-96 sets out the collective vision for the LEA. The slogan 'Excellence and Equality through Interdependence' used in the title pages, dominates throughout and shows an innovative departure from other statements of mission. The opening statement 'An LEA is the only body with the democratic legitimacy to take an overall view of the educational needs in the locality' underlines the continuing commitment to the local historic political culture which emphasises the importance of local political accountability as opposed to market accountability.

> I would and the majority of us would be unhappy to use any terminology associated with the 'market'. We've become 'user- conscious'....The legislation has given us more explicit responsibility for individuals. **(Director of Education; Northerton)**

Yet in spite of the ideological differences between Metroland and Northerton, the latter has embraced some aspects of the rhetoric and methods consolidated in legislation. A sharper ethic of efficiency has been developed. This is manifested in the way the services have been streamlined and are currently operating as central support services.

> In the structure of the organisation we've separated out two factions quite distinctly we have the 'client services' grouping which is separate from those which are here to support, encourage, judge and evaluate schools.. **(Assistant Director; Northerton)**

The 1992 Act in particular gives rise to one such example of the new orientation within the Authority in which the focus has shifted away from the formerly held 'advisory/supportive' relationships with schools towards a more 'hard edged' evaluative orientation. This represents a major cultural shift which is evidenced by the thrust and encouragement given to local Heads to embark on Ofsted training. This would have been unimaginable prior to 1992. Whilst such a shift has, in part, been driven directly by the legislation its specific form also derives from the particular way the LEA has chosen to interpret government policy. Here, too, references to 'moods' rather than policies are prevalent.

> At the initial stages of this developmental change there wasn't anything written down - it was a 'mood' at that time. The mood was then influenced by impending Ofsted arrangements and the need for a strategic decision about whether or not we (the LEA) actually engaged with Ofsted inspection - or whether we were going to stand aside and stay with support and advice. The decision to engage in it was made because it was seen as one means of developing 'The Intelligent LEA' - and in the intelligence gained about schools we would reflect the partnership approach.....Also; and this is a cultural thing, we are making a statement - alright, there are political agendas around Ofsted and the politics of the LEA is at the opposite pole from this but we think there is something to be gained for schools in this and we want schools to be there with us. **(Assistant Director; Northerton)**

Client services then cater for the needs of individuals and are distinct from 'community services' and services to schools' -those services which support, encourage, judge and evaluate schools - like Quality Assurance services. As in Metroland an in-house process of contracting is in operation within the education department. For each service area the department has defined 'customers' as those who hold the money, clients are recipients/ service users. Each service area has a

range of customers including - Council, Director of Education, Heads, Governing bodies, Ofsted and so on. Individual service plans detailed in relation to each customer are clearly defined and specific. Services to the Council are commissioned by the Directors and are commonly referred to as Directors Commissions. This may involve work of a statutory/ strategic nature in pursuit of the LEAs statutory or policy functions. Services which are provided to LMS schools at no cost are schools level entitlements - these would include evaluation/ consultancy services. Two kinds of service level agreements are in operation - those services contracted to other services in house with staff working across services on a contractual basis, and, those provided to schools on an agreed scale of charges.

This contract process has grown through the work of the Education Department on the Development Plan and as also draws on the notion of the Authority as interlinked and interdependent. It guides the work of the Department providing information on cost, and more importantly, offering the necessary accountability to council, and the LEA, who are paying for services.

> It's about saying this is your role for the LEA, this is a requirement by Council and it wont be income generating, but you need to know you've only got this number of days available to tender for inspection which you may, or may not win.....it tells us what it will cost because of accountability the Council are paying for the services as part of the LEA. **(Assistant Director; Northerton)**

Unlike Metroland there is no desire to develop an overt competitive edge to this organisational structure, or, for the organisation to become predominantly focused upon or driven by income generation. The 'externalising' of services is not on the agenda. Support services are, of necessity, becoming streamlined (a contraction in roles, facilities and personnel numbers and a consequent loss of expertise) but there is little evidence at this time that this is increasing the schools' interest in 'opting out'. Again this gives an indication of the strength of the underlying shared ethos within the LEA.

> What we have now is a very slimmed down version of what the authority feels it can provide, nevertheless I would never want to be anything other than part of the LEA because GM status would be like being let loose in 'shark - infested' waters. **(Headteacher)**

Focus has shifted away from organisational planning, away from structure, whilst much greater attention is paid to culture and ways of working both within the education department itself, and in the relations between officers and politicians, and between all parties and schools.

> There is some sense of services gaining autonomy almost to the point of destructuring, but there is still the will that it doesn't become too fragmented, values hold us together - we all of us- wouldn't want competition to creep into our system.....This attitude is so strong that's its constantly on the agenda on our Heads meetings. Heads are uncompetitive they want an LEA, they want a strategy- out of a secondary Heads conference 'they" chose the theme of school improvement, they developed a steering group for this purpose and have gone to the Director saying that they want it to be spearheaded by the LEA. It comes from them, it will be formalised and taken forward. We are all equal partners its not an education department initiative, its not a Heads initiative but one which has been taken together. **(Assistant Director)**

Conclusion

Both the LEAs reported here have re-structured to produce an organisation shaped on quality. This has involved extensive de- layering of the senior management structure, as well as some fundamental re-organisation of major services to refocus the skills and energies of the remaining personnel. The internal organisational structures, which has, in the case of Northerton a clear client - provider split and in Metroland a purchaser - client split, embrace detailed client specifications, business or service unit planning, quality standards and devolved management autonomy. The central premise of quality management - devolved and distributed decision making, clear accountabilities and performance measurement - is shared by both. Analytically the question is whether the similarities or differences are of most importance. Whether the intervention of the central state to re-work local government and local democracy is of over-riding significance compared with the 'tweaks', 'resistance's' and 'nuances' offered by individual Local Authorities. Whether 'interpretation' or 'agency' is the key concept here. Thus, on the one hand, we do need to emphasise the ways in which the requirements of legislation and their attendant discourses have significantly shifted the methods, practices, relationships and functions of both LEAs. But, on the other, it is necessary to acknowledge the freedom to manoeuvre available to and exploited by each. An LEA, like Metroland, which finds these new forms of local governance conducive and interprets its role as an **agent** of the central state, has considerable possibility for extending and developing the existing policy framework - 'over-interpretation'. For others, like Northerton, that are basically unsympathetic to most aspects of that framework, interpret their role, to an extent, as an **obstacle** to the central state, and continue to give emphasis to their **representative** role, trading upon their residual moral and political authority within their locality - 'under-interpretation'.

In addition however, it is important to not limit the analysis of these changes in the role and function of LEAs either simply as structural or extrinsic. The new policy framework, we suggest, is also designed to bring about significant intrinsic changes in the values and cultures of Local Authorities. Perhaps more importantly; the new framework is intended to achieve a depoliticisation of local government by replacing political dynamics with management and business methods and values. In effect to render local government into local administration. The re-modelling of responsibilities and relationships in the image of business now runs right through Local Authority and school organisation. Democratic accountability and control are virtually replaced by various forms of inter-locking quality and financial control and various forms of market relations.

Although for the purpose of this paper illustrative data was drawn exclusively from two of the LEAs under study, initial analysis of the other LEAs in the study leads us to believe that the emergent interactive relationships between stakeholders in the educational arena at local level show important commonalities. As other commentators have pointed out LEAs are caught 'in the middle' of two sets of changing power relations. With central government and with schools (Headteachers and Governors). All this has also opened up new avenues for parental interest at the level of school management through the realisation that what they say and do can impact on decisions made at both local and central government level. This sense of empowerment is seeping into the consciousness of knowledgeable and articulate governors and parents and is also playing it part in changing the old paternalistic culture of LEA control which was typical prior to 1988. The beginnings of a new debate about local democracy are evident.

> The justifications for local democratic institutions has remained... pickled in aspect... dead dogma, enfeebled by the local of real challenge, sustained only by long usage, upheld without understanding. (Butcher 1990)

Taken together the new 'educational politics' (Dale 1989) raises new and important questions about the 'politics of education' and the nature of local democracy. What ever the local nuances and idiosyncrasies there is a common basic issued that must be addressed. In other contexts the changes taking place in UK 'educational politics' could be seen as raising fundamental constitutional issues. But that interpretation is unavailable. The meaning and role of democracy in the UK is at issue here both in terms of the relationships between citizens and the state and the positioning, delivery and accountability of education in and to civil society. In effect we are seeing in the UK the fulfilment of (Chubb 1990) argument for education to be removed from the arena of politics. Or more accurately the creation of a new 'invisible' politics of education. Thus, it is important not to confuse what might be called 'little autonomies' and institutional 'freedoms' with community power and not to lose sight of the ways in which the new politics allow certain interests to maximise their advantages through their domination of local magistocracies and their abilities to 'work' deregulated market systems.

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